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SUBJECT: CANADA MAINTAINING 2009 IMMIGRATION TARGETS

REF: A. 08 OTTAWA 645
[1](#)B. TORONTO 40
[1](#)C. 08 OTTAWA 1324
[1](#)D. OTTAWA 231

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary. In light of the current economic conditions, Canada is reviewing its 2009 immigration targets but may end up maintaining Canada's 2009 target of about a quarter million new permanent residents. In 2008, Canada accepted a record high of 247,202 permanent residents. Canada is more likely to curb its temporary foreign worker numbers, which are based on job offers and market demand. Wooing "New Canadians" appears a strategic part of the ruling Conservative Party's efforts to pick up additional seats in communities with large immigrant populations around Toronto and Vancouver. End summary.

2009 IMMIGRATION TARGETS UNDER REVIEW

[1](#)2. (SBU) Minister for Citizenship, Immigration, and Multiculturalism Jason Kenney recently announced that Canada plans to accept 245,000 - 260,000 new permanent residents in [1](#)2009. Kenney told a parliamentary committee that Canada is one of the few developed countries not already decreasing its immigration in the face of domestic and global economic recessions. In late March, Kenney separately met with provincial officials to review economic data to determine if the 2009 immigration targets need to go down to reflect worsening labor market conditions. Speaking to the press, Minister Kenney stated that "we don't want people coming to Canada and facing unemployment. We need to be sensitive to the changing labor market, and if we need to make changes, we will." Although the results of the review are not yet public, a Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) official indicated privately to poloff that CIC nonetheless expects the 2009 immigration targets to remain untouched. In making the case to maintain current levels, Minister Kenney advised Parliament that Canada was looking beyond the current economic situation to the "mid to long-term," as Canada would "need newcomers to help fuel the jobs of the future" once conditions improve.

[1](#)3. (U) Minister Kenney also said publicly that he was "particularly concerned by short-sighted, divisive rhetoric that pits immigrants against Canadians in our economy." Separately, Liberal Senator Pierrette Ringuette (New Brunswick) had characterized job losses across Canada as "statistically huge" and called for the government to introduce a "Canada First" jobs policy that would "halt the foreign worker program so that Canadians will have the first opportunity to obtain these jobs and to work in Canada."

RECORD HIGH IMMIGRATION IN 2008

14. (U) Canada's 2009 immigration targets are similar to 2008, when Canada accepted a record high of 247,202 permanent residents. According to CIC, 2008 intake of permanent residents was greater than in 2007 (ref a) and 70,000 more than in 1998. Canada also accepted 193,061 temporary foreign workers and 79,459 foreign students in 2008, a combined total of 519,722 newcomers for the year.

15. (U) While CIC data shows that most immigrants settle in the urban centers of Toronto, Vancouver, or Montreal, a mid-March report by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) -- based on CIC and Statistics Bureau data -- detected a shift in immigrant settlement patterns toward suburban areas and smaller communities. (Note: The FCM is the national voice of municipal governments, with more than 1,775 members representing 90% of Canadians. End note.) The 2006 Census showed that the greatest shifts occurred from urban Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver into their nearby suburbs, most notably York, Peel, Laval, and Surrey. The City of Toronto's share of immigrants in the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area declined from 80 pct in 2002 to 63 pct by 2006; the City of Montreal's share over the same period fell from 79 pct to 67 pct; and, the City of Vancouver's share dropped from 56 pct to 35 pct. The report also cited Statistics Bureau data showing that 56 pct of new immigrants had children under the age of twelve, significantly higher than for non-immigrants. FCM President Jean Perrault (mayor

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of Sherbrooke, Quebec) commented to media recently that the government should give mayors a seat at the immigration planning table and provide more funding to smaller communities to cope with rising demands for child care services, education, health resources, jobs, and housing for newcomers.

CURBS TO TEMPORARY FOREIGN WORKER PROGRAM LIKELY

16. (U) Canadian provinces select temporary foreign workers based on job offers and market demand. In February, Minister Kenney publicly stated that he anticipates a decrease in the intake of temporary workers due to declining economic growth and rising unemployment. Opposition New Democratic Party immigration critic Olivia Chow has also argued that, if immigration cuts need to be made, the temporary worker category should be the first group to trim. According to Chow, many temporary foreign workers "are exploited and drive down wages of ordinary working families."

17. (U) The Immigration Minister has the authority to make changes to the immigration selection system without providing advance warning. Canadian immigration information websites have already begun to encourage prospective immigrants to file immigration applications now, noting that it may become more difficult to qualify if 2009 immigration numbers decline.

CONSERVATIVE OUTREACH TO "NEW CANADIANS"

18. (SBU) Minister Kenney leads the government's outreach to immigrant communities and minority groups. Almost 20 pct of the Canadian population is now foreign-born. According to the Statistics Bureau, the Toronto and Vancouver metropolitan areas rank higher than any other metropolitan area in North America or Australia in terms of the immigrant population as a percentage of the total population. Minister Kenney regularly appears at events nationwide sponsored by "New Canadian" groups, as well as at embassies representing those countries of origin. The CIC website even features a link for "inviting Minister Kenney to your community event." (In

tribute to his ethnic networking, pundits have labeled Kenney "Curry in a Hurry.") In the October 2008 federal election, the Conservatives picked up numerous seats in the greater Toronto and Vancouver areas at the expense of the Liberal Party (ref c), including districts with substantial immigrant populations, according to political analysts.

19. (SBU) Comment: The Conservatives would like to maintain their appeal to "New Canadians" and consolidate gains in those communities in the 2008 federal election. Given the Conservative Party's difficulties in Quebec (ref d), immigrant communities have taken on even greater political significance. "New Canadians" could be pivotal in vote-rich Ontario and British Columbia, where the Conservatives must pick up additional seats if they hope to remain in power or possibly even win a parliamentary majority in the next election.

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